[Robert Solomons, Sr.]

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Phoebe Faucette

Hampton County

390014

Social Customs of the Past

ROBERT SOLOMONS, SR.

(Verbatim Conversation)

Mr. Bobbie Solomons has spent a very active life ona large plantation. It is fitting that now in his old age he can enjoy the comforts of his lovely country home, and spend the time in reading, and talking with the many friends and relatives who visit him.

“As regards the slaves that we held before the Civil War”, he began, when questioned about the olden times, “I can only give you detailed information about my father's. He kept two seamstresses busy all the time, sewing for the ones that worked in the fields. And cooks were kept on the place to prepare the meals for them. One Sunday afternoons they would come to the house for a study of the catechisms. Quantities were members of the churches - Lawtonville and St. Peter's Churches. After the war every slave left him! But later some of them came back and sharecropped with him. He sharecropped his entire place. The corn was divided right away when harvested; the cotton, when sold. He had a negro who kept the commissary. That was worked on shares, too. The old negro who kept it, used to tell that one day when my father was settling up with a crowd of negroes, not thinking that he would get anything he went off by himself back of the commissary. 'After

a while; he said, 'I hear de ole boss say, “Where Montague?” so I went out to him and de ole boss put $150.00 in my hand! And I didn't think I had a cent. The negroes had good houses. There was a row of them in the street along the road in sight 2 of the house. They were treated all right; but there was a man who lived down the road who was cruel to his darkies. If you'd meet them in the road they'd have an eye out, or a big scar across their face. You could tell his darkies where you met them! They had to sleep under the man's house. He had a house built up high under the ground, and they stayed under there. It was just a big open space, with no enclosure or walls around it.

“There was no such thing as a Ku-Klux-Klan in this country. There were two garrisons stationed here after the war. One was at Beech Branch, and one at Lawtonville. The one at Beech Branch was made up of negroes under the auspices of the white one at Lawtonville.

“There's a big change in the people now from what they used to be. The people were better then. There might have been as good a man living, but I know that there never was a better Christian man living than my father! He would walk four miles every Sunday morning, and hold Prayer Meeting, then walk back. He and Mr. Williams were stewards.

“For sometime after the war there was a lot of stealing done by the darkies. We had a little pig that slept with the dog and her puppies. She had seven pigs - three a piece for my brother and me and one for my little sister. They stole hers and all three of my brothers. One year they killed fifteen head of cattle, and twenty seven head of my brothers. After I had charge of the farm they stole half a bale of cotton from under 3 the house. I had to start sleeping in the ginhouse. Had a swinging bed up there. I was fourteen years old when I began taking care of the farm. My father had died in 1869, and when my elder brother married, I had to take charge. There were eleven females in the family for me to look out for. I remember one night there was a party at Lawtonville. I was a member of a club down there and I wanted to go. So I prepared to slip out so that none of the darkies would know that I was gone. After dark I saddled my horse and hitched her in a little thicket of woods

that was near the back of the house. When I went up into the ginhouse and latched the door on the inside, and came on out through the lint-room. I got out and on my horse. When I came back about two o'clock in the morning they had stole half a bale of cotton. One time I had to go away and I set a negro to watching in my stead. My mother said she heard a 'Bum - Bum!'. Then the watchman came to the door calling her. He said they had started off with some cotton but when he fired they dropped it. The merchants would buy it night or day or any time. I know I stayed with my uncle Bob Gifford one year to help him with anything that would come up. He was a merchant, and he'd buy at all times of night.

“I don't remember when I was a boy hearing of a white man killing a darkie, or a darkie killing a white man. But there was a white man name, Sam that broke into a widow's house, a Mrs. Condon. He had blacked his face and thought he'd be disguised; but she recognized him. She didn't let him know then; that she recognized 4 him; but she did and he was convicted and hanged. He was always referred to as ole Sam-gallows. Years after I had an old darkie moving some beams for me. While he was working I said, 'You know, Jim, that's part of the gallows that hanged old man Sam-gallows.' You should have seen that nigger drop that beam and run!

“My daughter was telling me that near Savannah down on the Savannah River the government has seventy-five or eighty negro women digging up bones of Indians. I don't know exactly where it is; but it must be somewhere near the sugar refinery. Each one is given a five-foot square to dig, and they have to skim off the dirt a little at a time with little shovels so as not to disturb the bones. They find many of the skeletons complete with the parts all together. Others the joints have become separated. They've probably been there since before America was discovered! I asked her how in the world did they get those women to do that sort of thing. “Well', she said, 'They are women who are on relief; so I suppose it is that or starve. But you ought to see them disappear when knockin' off time comes. They don't tarry around there one minute! It's out in a lonely desolate place. Really

I don't know what would become of one of them should she be left alone and behind the others for any reason.'"

Source: Mr. Robert Solomons, Sr., 79, Luray, S. C.